Salafi Manhaj
www.salafimanhaj.com

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Bible: Its Alteration, Compilation and Translation

Woe (destruction) to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say "This is from Allaah," in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe (destruction) to them for what their own hands have written and woe (destruction) to them for what they earn

{*Baqarah: 79*}

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Introduction

Kenneth Cragg states about the New Testament, **"There is condensation and editing, there is choice production and witness. The Gospels have come through the mind of the church behind the authors. They represent experience and history."**[1]

Similarly, Dr Von Tishendorf, one of the most resolute conservative defenders of the Trinity, admitted that the New Testament had **"in many passages undergone such serious modification of meaning as to leave us in painful uncertainty as to what the Apostles had actually written."**[2]

The purpose of this section is to bring together the facts about the Bible, as presented by many Christian scholars. It is interesting that the author of the Old Testament book, Jeremiah, recognized the same facts all those many years ago: "How can you say, "We are wise, we have the law of the

[1] Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p.277

[2] James Bentley, *Secrets of Mount Sinai*, p.117

Lord," when scribes with their lying pens have falsified it? The wise are put to shame; they are dismayed and entrapped. They have spurned the word of the Lord, so what sort of wisdom is theirs?"[3]

[3] The Book of Jeremiah 8: 8-9

Alteration and Transmission of the Bible

Theologians recognize that the Bible contains many contradictions and prefer not to explain them away as some do. Simply, they accept this fact, often without a rejection of their belief. It is such honesty that accounts for the large number of Christian scholars looking into the origins of their religion.

After listing many examples of contradictions in the Bible, Dr Frederic Kenyon says: **"Besides the larger discrepancies, such as these contradictions, there is scarcely a verse in which there is not some variation of phrase in some copies (of ancient manuscripts from which the Bible has been collected). No one can say that those additions or omissions or alterations are matters of mere indifference."**[4]

[4] Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts,*

It is in the preface of the *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, 1978, that thirty-two Christian scholars **"of the highest eminence," backed by fifty Christian denominations**, wrote of the authorized version, also known as the *King James Version*, that: **"The King James Version has grave defects, so many and so serious as to call for revision."**

In 1957, the Jehovah's Witnesses published the headline "50,000 errors in the Bible" in their *AWAKE* magazine writing: "There are probably 50,000 errors in the Bible, errors which have crept into the Bible text."[5] Nevertheless, they go on to say, "as a whole the Bible is still accurate." **?!**

In *The Story of the Manuscripts*, the Reverend George E. Mernil quotes Professor Arnold as stating: "There are not more than 1500 to 2000 places in which there is any uncertainty whatever as to the true text."

The *Five Gospels* written by the *'Jesus Seminar,'* a group of **seventy four renowned Christian scholars from biblical**

[5] 8th September 1957

studies institutes and universities all over the world,[6] was the result of six years of dedicated study.

Deciding to produce a translation of the gospels which would not be biased by their personal Christian faith, they endeavored to discover the true words of Jesus in the Bible. From the whole text they selected those passages that they believed were the valid sayings of Jesus, and colour-coded them.

Although we have reservations about their elimination of longer passages which ignores the oral cultures' memorization ability, as well as the *Jesus Seminar's* tendency to equate the miraculous with myth, their conclusion was that: **"82% of the words ascribed to Jesus in the gospels were not actually spoken by him."[7]**

They go on to say: **"Biblical scholars and theologians alike have learned to distinguish the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. It has been a painful lesson for both the church and scholarship. The distinction between the two**

[6]Jesus Seminar, Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover (translators and eds.), *The Five Gospels* (1993), pp.533-537
[7]ibid. p.5

figures is the difference between a historical person who lived in a particular time and place and a figure who has been assigned a mythical role, in which he descends from heaven to rescue mankind and, of course, eventually return there."

The quotes above are merely the authors' opinions, the second quote about the mythical role can be understood from the fact that the concept of Jesus in Christianity is largely based on pagan Roman mythical characters and this will be addressed in a following chapter.

From the Jesus Seminar is an archaeological fact that is far more important than what can be regarded as 'their opinion': **"In fact we do not have original copies of any of the gospels. We do not posses autographs of any of the books of the entire Bible. The oldest surviving copies of the gospels date from about 175 years after the death of Jesus, and no two copies are precisely alike. And handmade manuscripts have almost always been "corrected" here and there, often by more than one hand. Further, this gap of almost two centuries means that the original Greek (or Aramaic) text was copied**

more than once, by hand before reaching the stage in which it has come down to us."[8]

"The oldest copies of any substantial portion of the Greek gospels still in existence – so far as we know – date to about 200 C.E. However, a tiny fragment of the Gospel of John can be dated to approximately 125 C.E. or earlier, the same approximate date as the fragments of the Egerton Gospel (Egerton is the name of the donor). But these fragments are too small to afford more than tiny apertures onto the history of the text. Most of the important copies of the Greek gospels have been "unearthed" – mostly in museums, monasteries, and church archives – in the 19th and 20th centuries."

They finally sum up this issue by saying: **"…the stark truth is that the history of the Greek gospels, from their creation in the first century until the discovery of the first copies at the beginning of the third century, remains largely unknown and therefore unmapped territory."**[9]

[8] ibid. p.6

[9] ibid. p.9

Peake's Commentary of the Bible notes: **"It is well known that the primitive Christian Gospel was initially transmitted by word of mouth and that this oral tradition resulted in variant reporting of word and deed. It is equally true that when the Christian record was committed to writing, it continued to be the subject of verbal variation, involuntary and intentional, at the hands of scribes and editors."**[10]

Encyclopedia Brittanica highlights: "Yet, **as a matter of fact, every book of the New Testament**, with the exception of the four great Epistles of St. Paul **is at present more or less the subject of controversy and interpolations (inserted verses) are asserted even in these."**[11]

After listing many examples of contradictory statements in the Bible, Dr Frederic Kenyon states: **"Besides the larger discrepancies, such as these, there is scarcely a verse in which there is not some variation of phrase in some copies (of the ancient manuscripts from which the Bible has been collected). No one can say that these additions**

[10] *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p.633

[11] *Encyclopedia Brittanica, 12th Edition, Vol. 3,* p.643

or omissions or alterations are matters of mere indifference."[12]

Ehrman mentions: **"In any event, none of the original manuscripts of the books of the Bible now survive. What do survive are copies made over the course of centuries, or more accurately, copies of the copies of the copies, some 5366 of them in the Greek language alone, that date from the second century down to the sixteenth. Strikingly, with the exception of the smallest fragments, no two of these copies are exact. No one knows how many different, or variant readings, occur among the surviving witnesses, but they must number in the hundreds of thousands."**[13]

Toland observes: "We know already to what degree, imposture and credulity went hand in hand in the primitive times of the Christian Church, the last being as ready to receive as the first was ready to forge books. This evil grew afterwards not only greater when the Monks were the sole transcribers and the sole keepers of all books good or bad, **but in the process of time it became almost absolutely**

[12]Kenyon, Eyre and Spottiswoode, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, p.3

[13]Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p.27

impossible to distinguish history from fable, or truth from error as to the beginning and original monuments of Christianity. How immediate successors of the Apostles could so grossly confound the genuine teaching of their masters with such as were falsely attributed to them? Or since they were in the dark about these matters so early, how came such as followed them by a better light? And observing that such Apocryphal books were often put upon the same footing with the canonical books by the Fathers. I propose these two questions: **Why should all the books cited genuine by Clement of Alexander, Origen, Tertullian and the rest of such writers not be accounted equally authentic?** And what stress should be laid on the testimony of those Fathers who not only contradict one another but are also often inconsistent with themselves in their relations of the very same facts?"[14]

Ehrman states further that: **"Nonetheless, there are some kinds of textual changes for which it is difficult to account apart from the deliberate activity of a transcriber. When a scribe appended an additional**

[14]John Toland, *The Nazarenes* (1718), p.73

twelve verses to the end of the Gospel of Mark, this can scarcely be attributed to mere oversight."[15]

Peake's Commentary on the Bible: **"It is now generally agreed that 9-20 are not an original part of Mark. They are not found in the oldest Manuscript, and indeed were apparently not in the copies used by Matthew and Luke.** A 10th century Armenian Manuscript ascribes the passage to Aristion, the Presbyter mentioned by Papias (ap.Eus. HE III, xxxix, 15)."

Kenyon et al note that: "Indeed an Armenian translation of St. Mark has quite recently been discovered, in which the last twelve verses of St. Mark are ascribed to Aristion, who is otherwise known as one of the earliest of the Christian Fathers; and it is quite possible that this tradition is correct."[16]

M.A. Yusseff observes: **"As it happens, Victor Tununensis, a sixth century African Bishop related in his Chronicle (566 AD) that when Messala was consul at**

[15]*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp.27-28

[16]*Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, pp.7-8

Constantinople (506 AD), he "censured and corrected" the Gentile Gospels written by persons considered illiterate by the Emperor Anastasius. The implication was that they were altered to conform to sixth century Christianity of previous centuries."[17]

Godfrey Higgins: "It is impossible to deny that the Benedictine Monks of St. Maur, as far as Latin and Greek language went, were very learned and talented. In Cleland's *Life of Lanfranc – Archbishop of Canterbury*, is the following passage: "Lanfranc, a Benedictine Monk, Archbishop of Canterbury, having found the Scriptures much corrupted by copyists, applied himself to correct them, as also the writings of the fathers, agreeably to the orthodox faith, *Secundum Fidem Orthodxum*"."[18]

Higgins goes on to say: "The same Protestant divine has this remarkable passage: "Impartially exacts from me the confession, that **the orthodox have in some places altered the Gospels…(the New Testament) in many passages has undergone such serious modification of meaning as**

[17]M.A. Yusseff, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, the Gospel of Barnabas and the New Testament*, p.81
[18]Sir Godfrey Higgins, History of the

to leave us in painful uncertainty as to what the Apostles had actually written."[19]

In all, Tischendorf uncovered over 14,800 "corrections" to just one ancient manuscript of the Bible, the *Codex Sinaiticus* (one of the two most ancient copies of the Bible available to Christianity today), by nine (some say ten) separate "correctors," which had been applied to this one manuscript over a period from 400 C.E. to about 1200 C.E.

Tischendorf strove in his dealings with his holy texts themselves to be as honest and was humanly possible. For this reason he could not understand how the scribes could have to reason he could not understand how the scribes could have so continuously and so callously "allowed themselves to bring in here and there changes, which were not simple verbal changes, but materially affected the meaning," or why they "did not shrink from cutting out a passage or inserting one."

In the preface of the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*[20] we read: **"Yet the King James Version has serious defects.**

[19] James Bentley, *Secrets of Mount Sinai*, p.117

[20] Oxford Press

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of biblical studies and the discovery of many biblical studies and the discovery of many biblical studies and the discovery of many biblical manuscripts more ancient than those on which the King James Version was based, made it apparent that these defects were so many as to call for revision."

In the introduction to the same 'version' they say:
"Occasionally it is evident that the text has suffered in the transmission and that none of the versions provides a satisfactory restoration. Here we can only follow the best judgement of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text."[21]

The great luminary of Western literature, Edward Gibbon, explains the tampering of the Bible with the following words: "Of all the manuscripts now extant, above fourscore in number, some of which are more than 1200 years old, the orthodox copies of the Vatican, of the Complutensian editors, of Robert Stephens are becoming invisible; and the two

[21]Here then we observe that even in the introductions to copies of the Bible, learned Christians are actually admitting that the transmission of the Bible is not trustworthy!!

manuscripts of Dublin and Berlin are unworthy to form an exception. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries C.E. the Bibles were corrected by Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, and by Nicholas, a Cardinal and librarian of the Roman Church, *Secundum Orthoxum Fidem*. Not withstanding these corrections, the passage is still wanting in twenty five Latin manuscripts, the oldest and fairest; two qualities seldom united, except in manuscripts. The three witnesses have been established in our Greek Testaments by the prudence of Erasmus; the honest bigotry of the Complutensian editors; the typographical fraud, or error, of Robert Stephens in the placing of a Crotchet and the deliberate falsehood, or strange misapprehension of Theodore Beza."[22]

[22]Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Volume 4,* p.418

<u>Thiede's First Century Fragments</u>

There are some who claim to hold early Christian texts, notably the German scholar, Carsten Thiede. Thiede claimed to have discovered three papyrus fragments of Matthew's Gospel from the first century, one hundred years earlier than previously thought. Thus, these fragments could be viewed as 'eye-witness' accounts of the life of Jesus. This opinion was popular with Evangelical Christians such as Joseph 'Jay' Smith, who relies heavily on Thiede's work.

Graham Stanton one of Britain's most eminent New Testament scholars and a leading specialist on Matthew's Gospel refuted the claims of Thiede. **Criticism was also gathered from ten other prominent scholars in the field.** The following, along with Stanton, also refute the erroneous claim made by Thiede that a fragment of Mark's Gospel has been found amongst the *Dead Sea Scrolls*: Professor Hartmut

Stegemann, a leading Qumran specialist who teaches at the *University of Göttingen*; Professor Hans-Udo Rosenbaum of the *University of Münster*; Dr R.G. Jenkins of Melbourne and Dr Timothy Lim, the Qumran specialist from Edinburgh.[23]

Thiede's extremely radical claims were discredited by the Jewish scholar Hershel Shanks in the May/June 1997 issue of *Biblical Archaeological Review* and Thiede's work was also referred to in the same journal as **"Junk Scholarship."**[24]

Professor Keith Elliot of the University of Leeds published a very critical review of The Jesus Papyrus, Thiede's book, in *Novum Testamentum*, a leading journal which publishes specialist articles on the New Testament writings and related topics. January 1997 saw the publication of T.C. Skeat's research, *The Oldest Manuscript of the Four Gospels*, in *New Testament Studies*, another important academic journal. Recognised as a leading specialist on Greek manuscripts for sixty years, Skeat shows that beyond reasonable doubt, the fragments of Matthew and Luke belonged to the earliest surviving four gospel codex. On page 30 of his research, Skeat

[23]Graham Stanton, *Gospel Truth* (1997) pp.200-202

[24]*Biblical Archaeological Review* (January/February 1997)

says: "If I say that I prefer to keep Robert's late second century dating, it is because I feel that circa 200 C.E. gives an unwarranted air of precision."

Stanton's own research on the origin and theological significance of the fourfold gospel was published in *New Testament Studies* in July 1997.[25] He mentions that the earliest Christian writer who seems to have known and used four gospels is Justin Martyr who wrote his *Apology* and his *Dialogue* shortly after the middle of the second century. Stanton says: "**There is no earlier evidence…in the period shortly before 150 AD Christians began to include the four gospels in one Codex.** This practice encouraged acceptance of the fourfold Gospel, i.e. the conviction that the four gospels – no more, no less – are the Church's foundation writings."[26]

Stanton also stipulates that his conclusion is somewhat more cautious than the generally accepted view that the fourfold gospels were an innovation when Irenaeus wrote in about 180 C.E.

[25]*New Testament Studies, Vol. 43* (July 1997), pp.317-346

[26]*Gospel Truth*, p.197

Other important studies that have ruled out Thiede's claims include:

1. Dr Klaus Wachel's work published in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik.*[27]
2. Peter M. Head in *'The Date of the Magdalen Papyrus of Matthew – A Response to C.P. Theide.'*[28]
3. D.C. Parker in *'Was Matthew Written Before 50 C.E.? – The Magdalen Papyrus of Matthew.'*[29]
4. In a special issue devoted to the Gospels, the popular German news magazine, *Der Spiegal*, noted in May 1996 that a famous contemporary papyrologist, Peter Parsons, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford University, has also presented evidence that flies in the face of Carston Thiede's hypothesis.

[27]Vol. 107, (1995) pp.73-80

[28]In *Tyndale Bulletin, Vol. 46* (1995), pp.251-285

[29]*Expository Times, Vol. 107* (1995), pp. 40-43

Translation of the Bible

We would like to bring the reader's attention to the scholar William Tyndale and his students who were persecuted and branded as heretics in the 16th century for translating the Bible into the English language for the benefit of the masses of English people who could not read Latin. **(!?)**

Up until this time, it was illegal for the "layman" to even look at the Bible, one had to be a fully qualified priest or clergyman!? So it actually took the established Church which claims today to be for all of humanity, 1600 years before they realised that the Bible(the so called 'word of God') should be made accessible in other languages!

Tyndale is sometimes referred to as the *'Father of the English Bible,"* he was born in Gloucestershire and educated at Oxford

(B.A. in 1512 and an M.A. in 1515) and at Cambridge where he studies Greek.

Tyndale's translation, which was done in exile in Germany, was the first printed New Testament in English translated from Greek.

Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London at the time, bought copies of Tyndale's translation in huge numbers in order for them to be burnt in public.

Thomas Moore published a dialogue in which he denounced Tyndale's translation as being **"not worthy to be called 'Christ's testament,' but rather 'Tyndale's own testament' or the testament of his master – the Antichrist."**

During his time in Antwerp, many attempts were made to lure him back to England. He was arrested by agents of Emperor Charles the 5th and taken to Vilvorde, six miles north of Brussels, where he was imprisoned in a fortress on 21 May 1535.

In August 1536 he was tried, found guilty of heresy (for having the nerve to even translate the Bible!!) and turned over to the secular power for execution. On 6 October 1536, William Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake.[30] John Wycliff and his students, known as the *Lollards*, also suffered similar persecution for translating the Bible into English.

The evangelical Christians would say that the people who persecuted the two characters, Tyndale and Wycliff, were not "real Christians," yet at the same time the Evangelical Christians denounce and brand as "heretical" the original followers of Jesus who had similar beliefs to Islaam. The lack of tolerance in Christianity is demonstrated in the way it has always treated "heretics" and this kind of demonisation is actually endemic to Christianity of whatever brand.

The detailed histories of John Wycliff and William Tyndale can be found in most history books about the Church in England.

[30]Bruce Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford University Press: 1993), pp.758-759